

**SB 349 - AN ACT CONCERNING THE PENALTY FOR POSSESSION OF A SMALL AMOUNT OF MARIJUANA.**

Testimony in favor of legislation.

Submitted by:  
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Good afternoon Chairmen McDonald and Lawlor and Members of the Judiciary Committee.

My name is Erik Williams and I am here to testify in favor of Senate Bill 349, An Act Concerning the Penalty for Possession of a Small Amount of Marijuana. I would like to first thank and applaud the Co-sponsors of this bill for once again making Connecticut a forward-thinking legislative leader. Your ability to look past the hype and hysteria surrounding this issue is remarkable and heroic.

I won't waste your time citing facts, figures statistics and polling data supporting my position. I am sure you have all done your homework and know by now that marijuana is less addictive than alcohol or nicotine according to the Institute of Medicine. You know that 90% of the 5 million Americans arrested for marijuana-related crimes over the past decade were for simple possession. You know that this backwards prohibition on marijuana has cost taxpayers and our society hundreds of millions of dollars, is overcrowding our prisons and making an easily regulated commodity easier for our children to acquire than alcohol or cigarettes. You know that there are exactly zero marijuana-related deaths in America each year.

I want to talk to you today as a taxpayer, citizen and father.

The State of Connecticut is facing an \$8 billion deficit over the next two years and you are being asked to take a sober look at our priorities as a state today and try to predict them into the future. As a taxpayer, I ask you to look at this issue from a purely fiscal standpoint like so many other issues. Does the state spend millions of dollars arresting, prosecuting and punishing non-violent criminals - your sons and daughters, friends, co-workers, parents and grandparents - or does it spend that money creating jobs, educating our children, saving farms, investing in transportation or energy conservation, protecting the environment, funding any one of the dozens and dozens of worthwhile programs and projects that will no doubt be cut out of the budget you pass this year? As a taxpayer, my vote is that you stop wasting my dollars on the first and put it towards any one of the latter.

As a citizen, I know that there is already selective enforcement of laws in our state and that we could desperately use more law enforcement to stop so many violent crimes, thefts at both the personal and corporate level and generally be a more positive and

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proactive presence in our community. Every day police officers are charged with making personal judgments as to which laws to enforce. Do they ticket that jaywalker? Do they stop every single car going one mile over the speed limit? No. They have bigger fish to fry. Honestly, I would much rather have a police officer spend his time stopping cars from speeding down my street where they can kill my or my neighbors' children than I would have them spend their time arresting a hard-working citizen for smoking marijuana. I can tell you from experience that I felt a whole lot safer walking the streets of Amsterdam at night than I do many cities in Connecticut. The hysteria of a lawless society resulting from decriminalization is overblown and simply wrong. Also as a citizen, I am embarrassed at the fact that it is our state's public policy to arrest a pain-riddled, cancer-stricken citizen - simply for trying to find some relief for smoking marijuana medically. It's morally reprehensible and just plain wrong.

And as a father, I believe that our current prohibition on marijuana is harming our kids. Right now it is easier for our minor children to get marijuana than it is to get alcohol. When my daughter or son is of majority age, I would much rather they smoke marijuana than binge drink. I would prefer they do neither, but given the choice, I think marijuana is safer and know it to be less addictive. I have also seen first-hand how two very promising young adults had opportunities snatched from them due to our backwards marijuana laws. Both were top-notch, over-achieving college students who were arrested for smoking marijuana. One lost his scholarship and the other had to give up his dream of one day working for the FBI. Young adults make stupid mistakes, but this one stupid mistake can ruin a life. Too many young lives have already been ruined, not by marijuana use, but by the unjust criminalization of marijuana use and this needs to change.

Ladies and Gentlemen of the Judiciary Committee, I ask you to make your decision on this bill like you do with all others - rationally and void of hysterics. The facts are on the side of decriminalization, the majority of the Connecticut citizens are on the side of it and history will be on the side of it as well.

Thank you.